

Arthur Bott's final walk

This article can also be seen at the website of [Railway Work, Life & Death](#), a project which improves our knowledge and understanding of British and Irish railway worker accidents from the later 19th century to the start of the Second World War.

Francis Howcutt recounts the accidental death of Arthur Bott, a brother of his great grandfather. Arthur's history is an example of how the railways helped provide the children of agricultural labourers with opportunities beyond their ancestral villages, as well as the associated dangers.

On the afternoon of Saturday 25 February 1905, Arthur Bott went out of his house at Great Bowden, saying he was going to see Johnson, the ganger of the Midland Railway, about a garden. He proceeded along the railway track that ran north from Market Harborough station in the direction of Langton. The driver of an express train from London to Leicester only had time to issue three sharp whistles before Arthur was hit, destroying the back of his head and scattering his brains. The verdict of the inquest held at the Shoulder of Mutton Inn, Great Bowden three days later was "accidental death".
[1] The funeral took place at Great Bowden on the following day.



Arthur Bott [2]

Arthur Bott had been born at Naseby, Northamptonshire in 1856, the seventh of nine children of Thomas Bott (formerly Bodfish) and his wife Catherine Bale. Although under five years old, Arthur was already a scholar at the time of the 1861 census. This contrasts with the much more limited opportunities available to his parents who had both made marks rather than signing the parish register when they married at Husbands Bosworth in 1840. The houses standing at Naseby in the middle of the 19th century, though picturesque, were largely built of cob walls with thatched roofs – many could accurately be described as overcrowded mud huts.

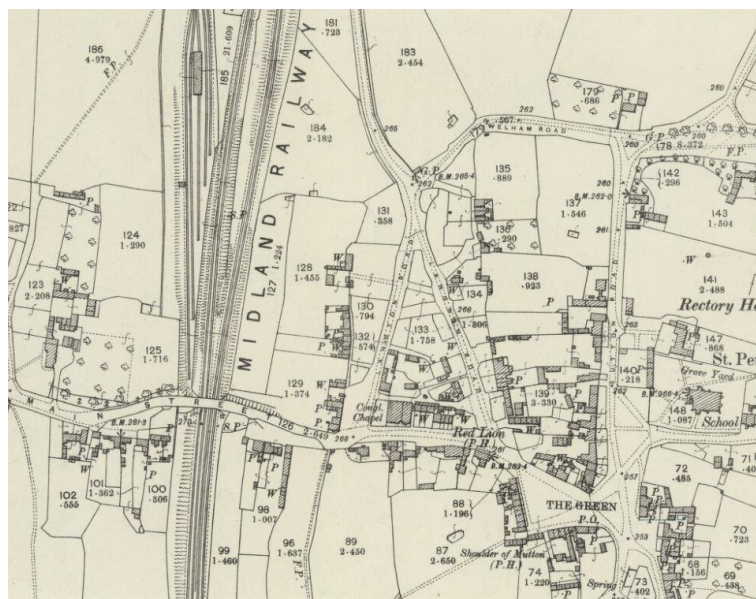
In 1871, Arthur was still in the parish of Naseby, where he was living in as a servant at Vale Farm. This was the home of John Everard, who employed five men and three boys to work on his 264 acres.

At the time of his first marriage, Arthur was a railway labourer living at Husbands Bosworth. The ceremony took place at that parish church on 28 April 1878, the bride being his cousin Lucy Ann Eames or Hames (c1852-1897). They both signed their names in the register. The couple were living at Church Street, Husbands Bosworth in 1881 and it was in that parish that their three oldest children were born between 1881 and 1884. By 1889, the family had moved to Stanbridge, near Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire.

The 1891 census records Arthur and Lucy with five children at Newland, Naseby. Arthur was employed as a mason's labourer. Three of the children – Alfred (aged 9), Beatrice (aged 7) and William (aged 6) - were described as scholars. It was at Naseby that a further child – Arthur – was born in 1894.

Lucy's final pregnancy ended in disaster. The birth and death of the baby Reginald were both registered in the Market Harborough registration district during the first quarter of 1897, as was Lucy's own death.

On 26 September 1900, Arthur married Maria Cooke (1870-1938), a spinster, at Melton Mowbray. Both were recorded as living in that town at 11 Chapel Street, but there is no indication of how long Arthur had been in the area or whether he was accompanied by his children. By the census of the following year, the couple had moved to one of the recently-built brick houses at Bath Street, Little Bowden, about half a mile south of the centre of Market Harborough. Arthur was described as a bricklayer (employer) and Maria as a dressmaker working at home on her own account. The three youngest children surviving from Arthur's first marriage were still at home. Maria's sister, Sarah Cooke, was present as was a visitor Jeannie Cooke who had been born at Melton Mowbray and so presumably also a member of Maria's family.



1899 map of the accident location [3]

The accident book of the Midland Railway records Arthur's occupation at the time of his death as a London & North Western Railway bricklayer. Market Harborough station was used by both companies. It was no doubt to the relief of the Midland's shareholders that the accident book noted that Arthur was "run over by express whilst trespassing". [4]

By the time of Arthur's death, the ages of his six surviving children ranged from 23 to 10. In view of their ages and the presence of their step-mother (who did not remarry) it is probable that none of them went to an orphanage or workhouse, which at that time was so often the fate of children whose parents died at an early stage.

The 1911 census provides evidence about some of those whom Arthur left behind. Maria had moved to Wellingborough where she ran a confectionery shop at 21 Mill Road. She remained at that address for the rest of her life, accompanied by her unmarried sister Sarah Ann. Five of Arthur and Lucy's children have been located in the 1911 enumeration:

- Alfred Henry and his wife Kate lived at Nottingham
- Beatrice Annie was recorded as Annie Bott living in as a housekeeper at Leicester
- William Charles was staying with his wife Beatrice Emily and also his brother Frederick at the house of Beatrice's mother at Duston, Northampton
- Arthur was a lodger at Brook House, Little Bowden

Their father's fatal accident had not dissuaded Alfred Henry and William Charles from both working as guards on the railways.

Notes

[1] *Northampton Mercury*, 3 March 1905, page 3, column 2.

[2] Edited from a photograph, courtesy of Phillip Edwards.

[3] Courtesy National Library of Scotland. <https://maps.nls.uk/view/114476870>

[4] The National Archives; Collection: Midland Railway Company: Records; Class: RAIL491; Piece: 1061.

Francis Howcutt is currently Digital Publications Editor of Northamptonshire Record Society. He has indexed the 1674 hearth tax lists for the whole of Northamptonshire and recently completed editing an index to over 87,000 probate records of the local courts that operated in Northamptonshire & Rutland until 1858.